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Applicants: Waesterlid

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ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Examiner: D Agosta, Stephen M.

Group Art Unit: 2683

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Stephen A. Herrera

REPLY APPEAL BRIEF PURSUANT TO 37 C.F.R. §§1.192-1.193

In reply to the Office Action dated May 7, 2003 that re-opened prosecution, Applicant requests reinstatement of the appeal filed April 17, 2003, and files the following Reply Appeal Brief. This brief is filed in triplicate pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.192. If any fees are due or required, Applicant requests that this be considered a Petition therefore, and the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge Deposit Account 18-1167.

(1) REAL PARTY IN INTEREST

The real party in interest is Ericsson Inc., Assignee of the present invention.

(2) RELATED APPEALS AND INTERFERENCES

There are no related appeals or interferences to the best of Applicant's knowledge.

(3) STATUS OF CLAIMS

A total of 25 claims have been presented for examination. Claim 9 was cancelled during prosecution leaving claims 1-8 and 10-25 pending. The Examiner has allowed claims 10-18, finally rejected claims 1-7 and 19-25, and objected to claim 8.¹ Applicant therefore appeals the rejection of claims 1-7 and 19-25.

(4) STATUS OF AMENDMENTS

Applicant believes that all amendments have been entered.

(5) SUMMARY OF INVENTION

As stated in Applicant's initial Appeal Brief, Applicant's claimed invention facilitates electronic communications between individuals sharing a common interest or affiliation (an "affinity" group), by providing a method and apparatus in which each member of the affinity group may send/receive status updates to/from each of the other members of the affinity group (see spec., p.2 ¶3). Hence, when any member undergoes a change in status, each of the other members of the affinity group receives the status update, and stores the status update in a personal communications device (see spec., p.2 ¶4 – p.3 ¶1). That way, one member of the affinity group can readily access the status of the other members of the affinity group at his/her personal communications device without having to request the information from the network each time (see spec., p.2 ¶3; p.3 ¶3). Note that the claimed status update methods are reciprocal (i.e., multidirectional updates), not "master-slave" type methods. That is, the transmission and receipt of status updates are not strictly limited to unidirectional communications from a single "master" to one or more "slaves," but instead the communication

¹ Applicant notes that the Examiner's Action dated May 7, 2003 is somewhat confusing, as it purports to reject claims 1-25 under §103, and specifically mentions claim 9 which was cancelled long ago. However, the Action also indicates that claims 10-18 are allowed (Summary of Action and page 8), therefore Applicant treats claims 10-18 as allowed, and claims only 1-7, 19-25 as rejected.

of status updates occurs bilaterally between all members of the affinity group, allowing each member of the group to track the status of any other member in the group (see spec., p.10 ¶14 – p.11 ¶1).

(6) ISSUES

Whether claims 1-7 and 19-25 are obvious under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over WO 98/17032 to Borgstahl et. al. (hereinafter “Borgstahl”) in view of the IETF Internet Draft entitled “SIP for Presence” to Rosenberg et. al. (hereinafter “Rosenberg”), and in further view of newly cited U.S. Patent No. 5,412,654 to Perkins (hereinafter “Perkins”).

(7) GROUPING OF CLAIMS

Due to the Examiner's allowance of claims 10-18 after the initial Appeal Brief, Applicant has changed the grouping of claims slightly, by consolidating allowed claims 10-18 into one group (group 6), so as to maintain the correlation between the arguments in the initial Appeal Brief and this Supplemental Appeal Brief, with respect to claim group numbering, for the convenience of the Board. For purposes of this appeal, the claims should be grouped as follows:

Group 1: Claims 1, 7, and 8.

Group 2: Claims 2 and 3.

Group 3: Claim 4.

Group 4: Claim 5.

Group 5: Claim 6.

Group 6: Claims 10-18 (ALLOWED).

Group 7: Claims 19 and 25.

Group 8: Claims 20 and 21.

Group 9: Claim 22.

Group 10: Claim 23.

Group 11: Claim 24.

All claims in each group stand or fall together.

(8) ARGUMENT

A. The Law of Obviousness

The PTO has the burden under § 103 to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness. In order to establish a *prima facie* case under §103, the Examiner must show 1) some suggestion or motivation to modify the primary reference or to combine the teachings of the references; 2) a reasonable expectation of success; and 3) that the prior art reference (or references, when combined) teach or suggest all the claim limitations. *E.g., In re Royka*, 490 F.2d 981, 180 U.S.P.Q. 580 (C.C.P.A. 1974); MPEP §2143. Further, it must be noted that if an independent claim is non-obvious under §103, then any claim depending therefrom is non-obvious. *E.g., In re Fine*, 837 F.2d 1071, 5 U.S.P.Q.2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988); MPEP §2143.03.

When combining references, the PTO can satisfy this burden only by showing some objective teaching in the prior art, or knowledge generally available to one of ordinary skill in the art, that would motivate one to combine the relevant teachings of the references. *In re Fine*, 837 F.2d 1071, 1074, 5 U.S.P.Q.2d 1596 (Fed. Cir. 1988). Obviousness cannot be established by combining the teachings of the prior art to produce the claimed invention, absent some teaching or suggestion supporting the combination. *ACS Hosp. Sys., Inc. v. Montefiore Hosp.*, 732 F.2d 1572, 1577, 221 U.S.P.Q. 929, 933 (Fed. Cir. 1984).

Whether or not a teaching, motivation, or suggestion exists that would lead one skilled in the art to select and combine references is central to the question of patentability with respect to obviousness. *In re Lee*, 61 U.S.P.Q.2d 1430, 1433 (Fed. Cir. 2002). Simply combining elements in a manner that reconstructs the applicant's invention only with the benefit of

hindsight is insufficient with which to establish a *prima facie* case of obviousness. *In re Rouffet*, 149 F.3d 1350, 47 U.S.P.Q. 2d 1453 (Fed. Cir. 1998). There must be some reason, suggestion, or motivation found in the prior art that would lead a person of ordinary skill in the field of the invention to make the combination. That knowledge cannot come from the applicant's invention itself. *In re Oetiker*, 977 F.2d 1443, 24 U.S.P.Q.2d 1443 (Fed. Cir. 1992). Therefore, in advancing a motivation to combine references, the Examiner must adequately address the issue of motivation to combine, specifically pointing out the reasoning supporting such a combination, and basing the reasoning on concrete evidence of record. *In re Lee, supra*.

B. As Previously Briefed, Neither Borgstahl Nor Rosenberg, Alone Or In Combination, Render The Claimed Invention Obvious

Previously, the Examiner finally rejected claims 1-8 and 10-25 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) over Borgstahl in view of Rosenberg. The Board is directed to page 5 of the initial Appeal Brief for a summary of the Borgstahl and Rosenberg patents.

As presented on pages 6-10 of initial Appeal Brief, to which the Board's attention is directed, neither Borgstahl nor Rosenberg, alone or in combination, teach or suggest the invention of claims 1-7, 19-25 for at least two reasons. First, the references fail to teach or suggest each limitation of independent claim 1.² Specifically, both Borgstahl and Rosenberg fail to teach or suggest "when the status of any member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group." Additionally, neither Borgstahl nor Rosenberg teach or suggest, "storing, in each individual members' communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group." Thus, neither Borgstahl nor Rosenberg, whether

² The Examiner rejected independent claims 1 and 19 for substantially the same reasons. For clarity, Applicant only reiterates the elements of claim 1 in this paragraph. However, independent claim 19 contains language similar to that of claim 1, and thus, a similar analysis with respect to the rejection of claim 19 applies. See arguments for the Group 1 and Group 7 claims on pp. 6-11 and 20-21 of the initial Appeal Brief, respectively.

considered alone or in combination, teach or suggest every required element of the claims. And, as discussed further below, the addition of Perkins does not cure this defect. Accordingly, the §103 rejection based on the three-way combination must fail.

However, even assuming *arguendo* that each limitation of claims 1-7, 19-25 is disclosed by Borgstahl and Rosenberg, the Examiner's proffered motivation to combine Borgstahl and Rosenberg is *legally insufficient* with which to support the §103 rejection. On this point, the Board's attention is directed to pages 10-11 of the initial Appeal Brief. In short, the Examiner defines the problem to be solved as providing the users with up-to-date information about the network for ease of use. However, the proposed solution (motivation) postulated by the Examiner does not solve the stated problem. Moreover, neither reference provides support for such an assertion, and thus, the motivation to combine Borgstahl and Rosenberg could only have been reached using impermissible hindsight reconstruction. However, hindsight reconstruction is improper as a matter of law. “[I]n order to prevent hindsight-based obviousness analysis, we have clearly established that the relevant inquiry for determining the scope and content of prior art is whether there is a reason, suggestion, or motivation in prior art or elsewhere that would have led one of ordinary skill to combine references.” *Ruiz v A. B. Chance Co.*, 234 F.3d 654, 57 U.S.P.Q. 2d 1161, 1167 (Fed. Cir. 2000) (citations omitted).

C. The Addition Of Perkins Does Nothing To Remedy The Already Flawed Combination Of Borgstahl And Rosenberg

In an attempt to correct the deficiencies pointed out in the initial Appeal Brief, the Examiner reopened prosecution and added the Perkins reference to the original §103 combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg.

Perkins discloses a system and method of link-layer routing in mobile communication networks that permit mobile terminals to create “ad-hoc networks” (Perkins, col. 31, ll. 37-40). Routing tables are stored in the memory of the terminals, and define one or more

communications paths along which the mobile terminal can exchange data with a desired destination terminal (Perkins, col. 2, ll. 32-37). Each communication path or link has, as an endpoint, a mobile terminal. The routing tables may be updated either periodically or on demand, and contain a metric that defines the number of "hops" (i.e., links through one or more mobile terminals in the ad-hoc network) for each route in the table (Perkins, col. 2, ll. 37-47). Lower values for the metric indicate that the mobile terminal can transmit a message to a destination terminal through a fewer number of mobile terminals or links, while higher values indicate that the mobile terminal must transmit the message through a larger number of links. Those routes having lower values are shorter (i.e., they have a fewer number of links), and are generally considered better routes (Perkins, col. 7, ll. 2-5). Thus, the system of Perkins uses link-layer routing to dynamically create communication networks, and permits a mobile terminal to choose the best possible route when transmitting a message to a desired destination terminal.

The addition of Perkins to Borgstahl and Rosenberg to form a three-way §103 combination is both improper for failure to provide a legally sufficient motivation to combine, and fails to remedy the deficiencies in the combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg. The Applicant's arguments on these issues are presented below in the context of claim group 1, but apply to other claim groups as indicated below.

Claim Group 1

Claim 1, the independent claim of Group 1, relates to a method implemented in a communications network that permits each member of an affinity group to send/receive status information to/from each of the other members in the affinity group. As stated in Applicant's

initial Appeal Brief, both Borgstahl and Rosenberg fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, claim 1.³ The addition of Perkins does nothing to remedy those deficiencies.

First, the Examiner apparently theorizes that because Perkins teaches the broadcast of routing information to other mobile terminals in the network, it necessarily teaches “sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group”. However, this is incorrect. Perkins teaches the broadcast of routing table information specifically for use in the creation of an ad-hoc network. This is evidenced in column 31 of Perkins, lines 37-39, which reveals, “The new routing algorithm of the invention was particularly developed for enabling the creation of 'ad-hoc networks'” (emphasis added). The communication of routing information specifically for creating a network says nothing about the sending a status update message from the member whose status has changed to each of the other members in the group, *and Perkins never suggests that it does*.

Further, the routing information broadcast by the terminals of Perkins does not include user status information. It consists only of the data necessary to create the network, and to help the mobile terminal determine the best communication path (i.e., metric) to a desired destination terminal. In particular, the information included in the routing tables of Perkins contains destination link-layer addresses, the number of “hops” to a given destination, a timestamp, the hardware address that transmits the routing table information, and the like (see, e.g., Perkins, col. 4, line 68 – col. 5, line 10). While this may help a mobile terminal to determine how to transmit a message to a destination terminal (i.e., along which communication path), it cannot tell the user of either mobile terminal anything about the status of the other user. Thus, Perkins does not teach “sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group,” as required by claim 1. In short, the combination proposed by the Examiner teaches that mobile terminals may broadcast routing information to be received by any other mobile terminal within communications range.

³ See arguments for the Group 1 claims on pp. 6-11 of the initial Brief.

However, there is no indication that, upon receipt of the broadcast routing tables, any of the receiving terminals are apprised of the user status of the transmitting mobile terminal as required by claim 1. Thus, the Examiner's contention is incorrect and finds no support within the Perkins reference itself. Indeed, the creation of the network and the determination of the best communication path, both of which result from the broadcast of the routing table information, occur regardless of the status of either user. Thus, Perkins, like both Borgstahl and Rosenberg, fails to teach or suggest the "when the status of any member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group."

Second, Perkins also fails to teach, "storing, in each individual members' communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group." Like Borgstahl and Rosenberg, Perkins discloses memory. However, also like Borgstahl and Rosenberg, Perkins fails to teach or suggest that the memory in the mobile communication devices is used to store user status updates from each other member in the group. In contrast, the prior art generally did not store this user status information, or stored the user status information in a central server only. Likewise, Perkins teaches that memory stores routing table information that simply describes properties of the hardware (i.e., addresses, etc.), the metric (i.e., the hops between terminals), timestamps, and pointer data (see Table 1 of Perkins, col. 9, ll. 20-30). As stated above, this information simply details how a mobile terminal may transmit a message (i.e., along which communication path), but says nothing about the status of the user.

In the original rejection, the Examiner put forth the same theory with respect to the Borgstahl and Rosenberg references by themselves. That is, the Examiner hypothesized that because the references disclosed memory, they *could* be used to store user status. Applicant pointed out, however, that neither reference taught or suggested that user status be stored in memory in the mobile communication devices. The Examiner never attempts to support the assertion with any factual evidence from either Borgstahl or Rosenberg, but instead, simply

adds the Perkins reference and leaves the assertion unchanged. Indeed, Applicant specifically requested that the Examiner point to support in the references (see Response of January 13, 2003, end of page 3), but the Examiner has ignored this request. Applicant wishes to reiterate that simply because something *can be used* to store user status does not mean that it *is* used to store user status. “The mere fact that the prior art could be so modified would not have made the modification obvious unless the prior art suggested the desirability of modification” (emphasis added). *In re Gordon*, 733 F2d 900, 902, 221 U.S.P.Q. 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1984). Perkins never discloses that the memory is used to store user status. Further, storing link-layer routing information to aid in network creation says nothing about the desirability of storing user status. Accordingly, Borgstahl, Rosenberg, and Perkins all fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, “storing, in each individual members’ communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group.”

Finally, notwithstanding the above facts, the proffered motivation to combine the three references still falls far short of the *legally sufficient* reasoning required to present a *prima facie* case under the law. The Board should take careful note that, although the Examiner added the Perkins reference in a new rejection, the alleged motivation to combine all three references remains unchanged from the flawed motivation behind the two-way combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg. Indeed, it is unclear how the Examiner is even proposing that the primary reference, Borgstahl, be modified according to both of the secondary references. Instead, the Examiner merely puts forth what he believes the two secondary references teach, then states exactly the same “motivation” to combine parroted from the Final Office Action. The Board should note that if the Examiner is to be believed, then the single motivation that previously prompted one to modify Borgstahl according to Rosenberg mysteriously now also provides motivation to modify that combination further according to Perkins. If, however, the combination of Borgstahl and Rosenberg “solves” that problem as previously asserted by the Examiner, then why would one of ordinary skill in the art be motivated to further modify something that already

solves the problem? The Examiner provides no insight whatsoever on this point. As such, the Examiner has failed to put forth any reason for modifying the result of the flawed two-way combination to form the three-way combination that is relied on to reject the claims. Absent such an explanation, the Examiner has failed to provide a *prima facie* case of obviousness. The Board is reminded that the Federal Circuit has made it clear that an Examiner must show motivation to combine references. As stated in *In re Rouffet*:

An examiner may often find every element of a claimed invention in the prior art. If identification of each claimed element in the prior art were sufficient to negate patentability, very few patents would ever issue... To prevent the use of hindsight based on the invention to defeat patentability of the invention, this court requires the examiner to show a motivation to combine the references that create the case of obviousness.

In re Rouffet, 149 F.3d 1350, 47 U.S.P.Q.2d 1453, 1457-58 (Fed. Cir. 1998).

In short, the Examiner's "explanation" of the current rejection makes it unclear as to the reason for the addition of the Perkins reference to the rejection, or even if the Perkins reference is relied on at all. In the latest action (dated May 7, 2003), the Examiner states that Borgstahl itself teaches all of claim 1 (see rejection language for dependent claim 2). If so, why is Perkins relevant? And, even if Perkins is relied on, Perkins fails to teach or suggest, "when the status of any member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group," and "storing, in each individual members' communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group". Finally, the Examiner never attempts to remedy the original *legally insufficient* motivation to combine, and does not address the three-way combination in any way. In the end, it appears as though the Examiner is simply attempting to legitimize the original flawed motivation by adding a reference that discloses broadcast communications. However, the Patent Office is not permitted to reject a claim based on a collection of unrelated teachings. There must be some reason, suggestion, or motivation found in the prior art that would lead a person of ordinary skill in the field of the invention to make the

combination. In this case, the teachings of the Borgstahl, Rosenberg, and Perkins references all fail to provide that motivation. It could only have come from Applicant's own disclosure, and this is improper hindsight reconstruction. *In re Oetiker*, 977 F.2d 1443, 24 U.S.P.Q.2d 1443 (Fed. Cir. 1992).

Based on the above, the Examiner has failed to present a *prima facie* case of §103 obviousness for the combination of Borgstahl, Rosenberg, and Perkins. The Examiner has failed to provide a legally sufficient motivation to combine all three references; and, even if the references are combined, they fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, all the limitations of claim 1. Accordingly, the §103 rejection with respect to independent claim 1, and dependent claim 7, is improper.

Applicant notes that claim 8 of claim group 1 is not rejected, but only objected to. If independent claim 1 is allowed, then claim 8 needs no amendment to be allowed. If the rejection of independent claim 1 is sustained, Applicant would appreciate the opportunity to amend claim 8 to remove the objection by amending claim 8 to be in independent form, including all the limitations of its base claim and any intervening dependent claims.

Claim Groups 2-5 and 8-11

Although the §103 rejection to the claims of Groups 2-5 and 8-11 has been maintained, the Examiner never attempts to apply the Perkins reference to the rejection of the corresponding claims. Instead, it appears as if the Examiner relies solely on the original rejection of Borgstahl and Rosenberg. However, the claims of Groups 2-5 and 8-11 are patentably non-obvious for the same reasons as those stated in Applicant's initial Appeal Brief. The addition of Perkins does nothing to remedy the earlier deficiencies, nor does the Examiner even bother to assert that it does. Further, the claims of Groups 2-5 and 8-11 are patentable for the reasons stated above for claim 1. Accordingly, §103 rejection to the claims of Groups 2-5 and 8-11 should be overturned.

Claim Group 6

The Examiner has indicated that the claims of Group 6 are allowed, even when considering the addition of the Perkins reference. Applicant agrees, and as such, considers further discussion with respect to these claims moot.

Claim Group 7

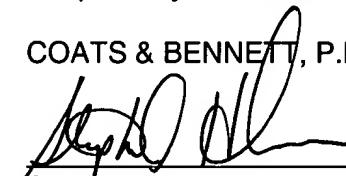
Claim 19, the independent claim of Group 7, recites a mobile communications device used in the methods of claims 1 and 10. The Examiner rejected claim 19 for substantially the same reasons as those recited for claim 1. However, as pointed out above, the Examiner has failed to provide a legally proper *prima facie* case under §103, as the Examiner has, at a minimum, failed to provide a motivation for the three-way combination relied on by the Examiner. Further, as explained above with respect to claim 1, Borgstahl, Rosenberg, and Perkins, all fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, the reciprocity of communication of user status and storing user status in memory for each member limitations of claim 19. Therefore, for reasons similar to those discussed above with respect to method claim 1, Borgstahl, Rosenberg, and Perkins, all fail to teach or suggest, alone or in combination, independent claim 19, and it dependent claim 25.

(9) CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, all claims being appealed herein are patentable, and the rejections maintained by the Examiner must be reversed.

Respectfully submitted,

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(10) APPENDIX

Claims for Appeal

1. A communication method implemented in a communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
- b. storing, in each individual members' communication device, status information concerning each other member of said affinity group;
- c. when the status of any member in said affinity group changes, sending a status update message from said member whose status has changed to said each other member of said affinity group;
- d. receiving said status update messages concerning each other member of said affinity group at said each other member's communication device; and
- e. updating said status information in said each other member's communication device when a status update message concerning said any member is received.

2. The communication method according to claim 1 wherein said status information comprises a plurality of status items.

3. The communication method according to claim 2 wherein the status information includes at least one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.

4. The communication method according to claim 2 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to each other member of the affinity group.

5. The communication method according to claim 2 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are enabled.
6. The communication method according to claim 2 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.
7. The communication method according to claim 1 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.
8. The communication method according to claim 7 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message to said each other member of said affinity group when a change in status is detected.

10. A communication method implemented in a mobile communication network for allowing members of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said communication method comprising:

- a. forming an affinity group containing two or more members;
- b. storing member status information data in each mobile communication device used by said members;
- c. sending a first status update message from a first member's communication device to a centralized server when said first member's status changes;
- d. forwarding said first status update message from said server to each other member of said affinity group, including a second member of said affinity group;
- e. receiving said status update message at said second member's mobile communication device and updating said status information in said second member's mobile communication device when said status update message is received;
- f. sending a second status update message from said second member's communication device to said centralized server when said second member's status changes;
- g. forwarding said second status update message from said server to each other member of said affinity group, including said first member of said affinity group;
- h. receiving said status update message at said first member's mobile communication device and updating said status information in said first member's mobile communication device when said second status update message is received.

11. The communication method according to claim 10 wherein said status information comprises a plurality of status items.

12. The communication method according to claim 11 wherein the status information includes at least one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.
13. The communication method according to claim 11 wherein each individual member selects the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to each other members of the affinity group.
14. The communication method according to claim 11 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are enabled.
15. The communication method according to claim 11 further including the step of designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.
16. The communication method according to claim 10 further including the step of automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.
17. The communication method according to claim 16 wherein the status of a member is monitored by said member's communication device and wherein said communication device is programmed to automatically transmit a status update message to said affinity group when a change in status is detected.
18. The communication method according to claim 16 wherein the status of a member is monitored by a centralized server in said communication network and wherein status update

messages are transmitted to other members in said affinity group when a member's status changes.

19. A mobile communication device for allowing a member of an affinity group to send status information to and receive status information from other members of said affinity group, said mobile communication device comprising:

- a. a memory for storing member status information data;
- b. a transmitter for transmitting status update messages to other members of said affinity group when said member's status changes;
- c. a receiver for receiving status update messages from other members of said affinity group;
- d. a processor operatively connected to said memory for writing status information to and reading status information from said memory, said processor being programmed to:
 1. generate a status update message when said member's status changes for transmission by said transmitter to each other member of said affinity group; and
 2. update said status information stored in said memory when a status update message is received from another member of said affinity group.

20. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 wherein the member status information stored in said memory includes a plurality of status items.

21. The mobile communication device according to claim 20 wherein the status items include one or more of the following status items: on/off status of the member; activity status of the member; and location of the member.

22. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for selecting the status items from a list of available status items that are reported to each other member of the affinity group.
23. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for designating a period during which status updates are enabled.
24. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for designating a period during which status updates are suppressed.
25. The mobile communication device according to claim 19 further including means for automatically detecting status changes of a member and sending status update messages to said each other member of said affinity group when a status change is detected.